How To Walk Before God

VAUBERT

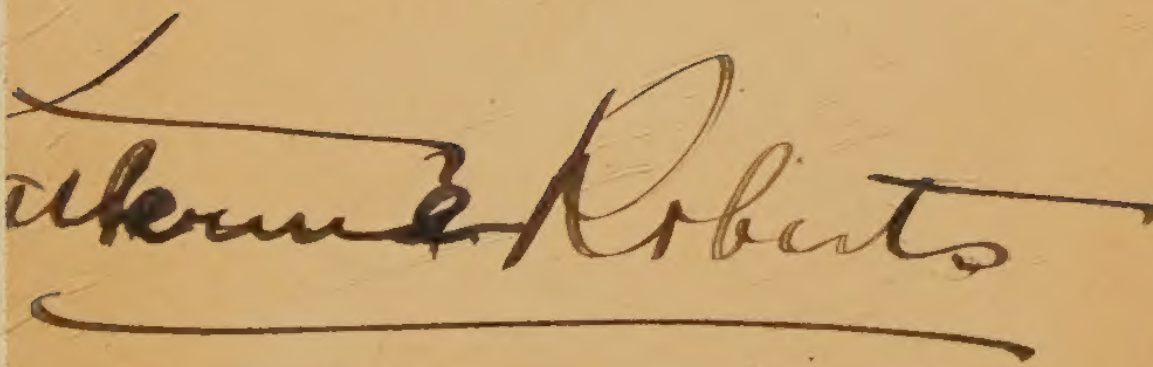
BX
2350.6
V3813
1910
GTU
Storage

Library of the
Church Divinity School
of the Pacific

Class
Roberts
2

S
354
9625

Library of the
Church Divinity School
of the Pacific



GRADUATE THEOLOGICAL UNION
LIBRARY
1961

HOW TO WALK BEFORE GOD

OR

THE HOLY EXERCISE

OF THE

PRESENCE OF GOD

IN THREE PARTS.

CHURCH DIVINITY SCHOOL of the PACIFIC LIBRARY

Translated from the French

OF

T. F. VAUBERT,

OF THE SOCIETY OF JESUS.

REVISED EDITION.

Ambula coram me et esto perfectus.
Walk before me, and be perfect.
Genesis, xvii, 1.

ST. LOUIS, MO., 1910
PUBLISHED BY B. HERDER
17 South Broadway
FREIBURG i/B. Germany | LONDON, W. C. 68, Great Russell St.

BX
2350.6
V38L3
1910

NIHIL OBSTAT.

Sti. Ludovici, die 1. Sept. 1910.

F. G. HOLWECK,

Censor Theologicus.

IMPRIMATUR.

Sti. Ludovici, die 1. Sept. 1910.

✠ JOANNES J. GLENNON,

Archiepiscopus Sti. Ludovici.

—BECKTOLD—
PRINTING AND BOOK MFG. CO.
ST. LOUIS, MO.

XS
V354

TO THE

IMMACULATE HEART OF MARY,

THAT HEART FULL OF GRACE,

THE DELIGHT OF THE HOLY TRINITY,

THE PALACE OF DIVINE LOVE,

THE MODEL OF THE INTERIOR LIFE,

THE SEAT OF ALL VIRTUES,

"THE GOLDEN ALTAR,"

WHENCE CONTINUALLY ASCENDS THE

INCENSE OF THE PUREST PRAISE,

IS THIS TRANSLATION

MOST HUMBLY DEDICATED,

BY THE LAST AND LEAST WORTHY OF

HER SERVANTS.

39625

PREFACE.

The following little treatise on the manner of exercising the presence of God, selected from three authors greatly esteemed for their piety, will, it is hoped, be found very useful to such as desire to be instructed in their obligations regarding this holy practice, whatever be their state or condition, as well as to those who are charged by their ministry to teach and instruct them. Without a lively sense of the divine presence the mind languishes in the meditation of truths the most essential and affecting. A lively conviction of the presence of God is the soul of all good works.

Without it the Christian, like the hypocritical Jew, honors God with his lips whilst his heart is far from Him, and thus, so far from drawing down, by the holy exercise of prayer, some drops of the celestial dew of grace, he therein experiences disgust and dissatisfaction.

Whence comes it that the Royal Prophet prays with so much fervor, and that the Holy Ghost has instructed so many by the truths contained in his psalms, but because he had God always present, I have, said he, God ever before my eyes. (Ps. xv. 8.) It is the exercise of the divine presence which has formed so many holy bishops and confessors, so many solitaries and recluses, and sanctified so many others in all the bustle of active life; it was what made holy Job tremble, and rendered

him so circumspect in all he did. I feared all my works, said he.

Meditate on this great truth, Christian soul; it is, alas! one that is too little attended to. To the shame of our age be it said, we live as if the all-seeing eye of the Omnipotent were closed upon our ways. Let your faith, on the contrary, be practical; by exercising it you will soon learn its advantages, and your advancement in piety and devotion will be so evident as to convince all that he who walks before God will assuredly become perfect. (Gen. xvii. 1.)

THE HOLY EXERCISE

OF THE

PRESENCE OF GOD.

PART I.

CHAPTER I.

God every where present.

God is every where present. He is in Heaven, on the throne of His glory, where He forms the delight of the blessed; He is on earth, not only by His knowledge of what passes there, or as the sun by his rays and influences, or as a king who is in every part of his dominions at one and the same moment by his authority, as some have erroneously imagined; but He is there by His essence, by His presence, by His power; ruling, preserving, governing all things. To this divine truth the greater part of Christians pay little or no attention.

Children are taught in their infancy—it is one of the first truths to be met in the Christian doctrine; but as they repeat it without understanding it, it makes no impression on their minds, and has no influence on their after conduct.

The prophet Jeremy, at the dictation of the Holy Ghost, declares to us that the Lord fills Heaven and earth. His immensity being essentially without limits, it follows, by a necessary consequence, that His being is intimately present in all beings—that is, that there is nothing between God and them; that He absorbs us in Himself, environs us, fills us, is more intimately united to us than we are to ourselves; that we *are* in Him, that we *live* in Him, that we perform all our actions in Him. As St. Paul says, "The Lord is not far from any one of us, for in Him we live, move and have our being." (Acts xvii. 28.) Oh, how little is this consoling truth

known, how few reflect on it. With what reason might we not reproach Christians, as St. John the Baptist reproached the Jews—"There is one in the midst of you whom you know not," and whose presence you forget to honor and reverence, infinitely adorable though it be. (John i. 26.)

Convinced of our blindness, let us humbly ask of God, with the blind man in the gospel, to enlighten us: Lord, grant that I may see. (Luke xviii. 41.) Let us say with the Psalmist, where shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy face? If I ascend to Heaven, thou art there; if I descend to Hell, thou art there also. (Ps. cxxxviii. 7.) As the birds wherever they fly meet the air, and as the fishes wheresoever they swim meet the water, so whithersoever we go we continually find God, and find him, as St. Augustine says, more present to us than we are to ourselves.

CHAPTER II.

God is every where with all His Greatness.

God, being infinitely perfect, is not composed of parts; He is incapable of division, and, therefore, must be entire in every place. If whole and entire in all places, He is in all places with His divine perfections in all their excellence. In the least grain of sand as in the highest heaven, He is no less adorable, no less worthy of our respect and praise. His presence, then, demands our attention in all places; His greatness deserves our praise, His omnipotence our respect, His beauty our admiration, His goodness our love, His mercy our confidence, His liberality our gratitude, His justice our fear, His providence an entire abandonment of ourselves into His adorable hands. It is this last sacred attribute that particularly claims our homage. In effect how is it possible not to confide in this Divine Providence

since God permits, nay wishes, us to regard Him as a Father, whose love infinitely surpasses that of all the fathers and mothers on earth put together: A father infinitely rich in mercies, always ready to forget our sins when we detest them, always present in our wants, overwhelming with His benefits those who fear Him; covering them with His wings as an eagle does her young, writing them in His hands (Isaiah xlix. 16,) and keeping an account even of the number of the hairs of their head. (Luke xii. 7.) How happy should we be, if our eyes were opened to so many wonders, and if, profiting by the light of faith, we were every where, and particularly within ourselves, contemplating the three divine persons of the Adorable Trinity, with all their glory and wonderful attributes. The earth would then become a paradise, and nothing would be capable of disturbing our repose; even amid the strangest events

and unforeseen accidents we should still remain in peace, conscious of being surrounded on all sides by the power and goodness of an Omnipotent God, to whom all creatures on earth and in hell are subject and equally bound to obey.

CHAPTER III.

God being every where, we should remember His Divine presence in all places and at all times.

If it be the property of great and wonderful things so to attract our attention and occupy our minds that extreme violence would be necessary to withdraw our attention from them, how is it possible that we think so seldom of God, before whom honor is but a phantom, and beauty but a name? How can it be that this divine being, who during all eternity will be the admiration of the blessed, should be thus consigned to forgetfulness and every where entirely forgotten. O blindness of the human

mind, how incomprehensible thou art! Entirely occupied with the earth, we seek all our support in creatures; God alone is neglected. Though near, He is not seen; we think as little of Him as if every thing were in our power and that nothing depended on him.

The great St. Theresa, a seraphic soul, penetrated deeply with a sense of the divine greatness, declared that after having contemplated the majesty of God the most perfect creatures appeared in her eyes as so many atoms, and that she was covered with confusion at the idea that she could still occupy her mind with, and was yet in danger of fixing her affections on them.

If we reflect on the occupation of the greater part of mankind, we shall find that it is confined to earthly things: houses, gardens, lands, horses, furniture equipage, dress, honors, pleasures, and other temporal things take up all their attention. It would seem, as St. Augus-

tine says, that man is become all flesh, for he thinks of nothing but what falls under the observation of his senses. He passes all his life, alas! in the forgetfulness of a God present, who alone can constitute his happiness, and who alone deserves the thoughts of his mind and the affections of his heart. Strange corruption! unfortunate blindness! which, withdrawing man from his principal and only duty, enslaves him to sensible things. Infamous dominition of the animal part, which, abasing man below the brutes, renders him the most unfortunate and contemptible of all God's creatures.

Can we be amazed, that after these reflections a person should joyfully prefer solitude, which affords him the peaceful enjoyment of the company of the three Divine Persons of the most Holy Trinity, to the most agreeable earthly society, in which he can scarcely have a single word or idea of spiritual

things! This is what formerly peopled the deserts with anchorets and the monasteries with religious. Having no other company, no other pleasure than God alone, they possessed that solid peace of which the world is ignorant, and thus, leading an angelic life, already tasted by anticipation the delights of Paradise.

Let no one, then, complain of loneliness, since we have, in all places, that divine company which constitutes the bliss of the elect. Oh, that religious persons thought of this truth! their solitude would no longer appear wearisome; on the contrary, they would regard it as one of the truest sources of their happiness. Oh, that the poor and abandoned would reflect thereon! it would afford them the truest consolation. Oh, that all persons recognized this gift of God! they would soon clearly see how easy it is to dispense with the creature when we have the Creator.

If we but knew the honor conferred on us by being allowed to entertain ourselves with the Divine Majesty, there is nothing which we would not do to enjoy so divine a gift. A soul enlightened by the spirit of God clearly sees that to enjoy this happiness but for a single moment, it would not be too much to labor and suffer during her whole life. We can enjoy this inestimable honor whensoever we please, yet we slight and neglect it. Woe to us if we make of it such small account. Woe to thee, O world, which, having God present every where, in thy blindness regardest Him no where; who art wearied with His blessed remembrance, and tired with the least word which is said of Him, preferring to Him the vilest interest and the most contemptible pleasure.

But whence does this deplorable blindness proceed, if not from attachment to earthly things; or because the eyes of the soul, being obscured by sin,

are incapable of beholding the divine light, and of contemplating spiritual things. Oh, "blessed are the clean of heart," for they shall see God. It is to such He manifests himself with such indescribable love; it is on such He confers the favor of His divine presence.

Purity of heart is, indeed, the best disposition for obtaining this precious gift; for though it be true that those who seek God sincerely will find Him, and hence, that those who, from time to time, apply themselves to the practice of His divine presence, will gradually, with His holy aid, acquire a habit of it, yet it is certain that He will manifest Himself much more perfectly to those who serve Him by a perfect renunciation of the world, themselves and all things else.

CHAPTER IV.

God being present every where, demands in all places our interior and exterior homage.

Let us learn from the adorable Jesus, our divine master and model, what respect we should render to the supreme majesty of God. This blessed Lord, who is equal to His Father, desires, in consequence of the profound respect He entertains for Him, to annihilate Himself before him in the adorable Eucharist. Now, if He who is all, reduce Himself to such a state of abjection, to what should the creature, which is nothing, reduce itself? Poor mortals as we are, shall there be henceforth anything too humbling for us; or rather, shall we be able to find sufficient means to humble ourselves? It is no wonder that the saints have always lived in a spirit of sacrifice; that they have made themselves living victims, immolating themselves continually to the greatness of God, by the destruction of their pas-

sions, their self-will and self-love; that they have endeavored to avoid the attention of men, and to have no part in their esteem or friendship, believing that it would be criminal to enter into competition with God, by dividing with him those minds and hearts which should be occupied only with him. It is extraordinary what means this sentiment induced them to adopt in order to be hidden from the creature and forgotten by men.

The interior respect which we owe the divine presence is a state of perpetual annihilation, which induces us to sacrifice continually to God all that we do, all that we suffer, and in fine, all that we are, and all that we may be, with regard to the rest of the world. In this state, regarding self no longer, one sees but God, and does all the good the divine majesty requires; then the ways which conduct to Him, and which in the beginning appear most difficult,

become smooth, and the heart, being lightened, runs, as it were, "in the path of perfection." (Ps. cxviii. 32.)

Moreover, a person not only does good, but he does it in a manner exempt from an infinity of defects, which often destroy the merits of our best actions, while we are feeding ourselves with the notion of having done wonders and made a great progress in virtue. The presence of God sanctifies our most indifferent actions, as eating, drinking, sleeping, necessary recreation, and makes the Christian act as a Christian in all cases, being always animated by supernatural motives.

As to the exterior respect we should render to the adorable presence of God, it is easy to conceive a just idea of it when we are persuaded that He sees us and attentively observes all our actions. If the presence of the great ones of the world, who are as nothing before God, inspires us with respect; if those who

are toying and amusing themselves, instantly cease and regulate their exterior at the appearance of a person of quality, is there any place or any occasion in which our exterior should not be modest and respectful, since God is more intimately present to us in all places than we are to ourselves. This is what induced St. Paul to exhort us to great modesty, "Let your modesty be known to all men," said he, "for the Lord is nigh." (Philip iv. 5.) The illustrious Bishop of Bellay, John de Camius, relates that having often watched St. Francis de Sales in his chamber, to see how he acted when alone, he always observed the greatest modesty and decorum in the holy prelate, because he never lost sight of the majesty of God.

As Christians, we are bound to imitate him. Animated by faith in this holy truth, we should put on the new man, separate our hearts from earthly

things, and live in a continual attention and application to God, as far as is consistent with our weakness. We should, as the Apostle says, live as children of light, and not as children of darkness, whose obscurity proceeds from their ignorance of divine things and this want of attention to the divine presence. (Eph. v. 8.)

He who does evil, says our blessed Lord, shuns the light—that is, he turns away from the remembrance of the presence of God, lest in its brightness he should perceive his own shame; but those who walk in the divine presence do not act so, for they never do anything when alone which they would fear to do before the greatest personage on earth. If they speak, it is like persons who are heard by God; if they walk, or eat, or drink, it is as becomes those who are seen by God. In every place and time they observe a Christian moderation, and avoid the least excess;

they take recreation as children before a good and infinitely perfect parent who requires them to imitate Him. David, in the midst of the embarrassments attendant on his kingly dignity, says that his "eyes were always on the Lord," that he had Him always in his sight. (Ps. xxiv: 15.) The idea of the presence of God, has made so deep an impression on some enlightened souls, that they have been often found prostrate when alone and almost annihilated before His supreme greatness. The holy Baron de Renty and Gregory Lopez, went continually with their heads bare, sometimes exposed to rain and sun, through respect for the divine presence.

But the principal effect which this divine truth should produce in us is to deter us from committing sin. O that our faith in it were but sufficiently animated; nothing could be more efficacious in preventing us from falling into sin

than this great truth, GOD CONTINUALLY BEHOLDS US. What is most surprising of all is, that the sinner not only commits sin in the presence of God, but even in God himself, His immensity filling all things. Several holy persons say that God is more present in us than our own soul—that it is in Him we live, move and have our being; and if this be so, and that He is the principle of our every movement, it follows that when we sin, we, by an execrable audacity, take advantage of the concurrence of our Creator, to offend and outrage Him by the bad use of the faculties, whether of mind or body, He has given us. After such a horrible atrocity we should cease to wonder that sin is punished with eternal flames.

It is an incontestable truth that God beholds us as attentively as if we were alone in the universe. He weighs our least thoughts, our slightest words and actions, and yet there are many of them

that we would blush to have known to the humblest individual on earth. With much more reason should we be ashamed of their being known to this Divine Being. St. Theresa assures us that she was seized with such fear and terror when she reflected on the frightful appearance a soul in sin made in the presence of God that it almost deprived her of life. Oh that all were filled with her sentiments!

CHAPTER V.

God being every where present, every where demands our love.

As God's being is a consuming fire, according to St. Paul (Heb. xii. 29), and charity itself, according to the beloved disciple (John iv. 16), and as this Divine Being fills all things and is more present within us than we are to ourselves, it follows that we are surrounded by Him on all sides, that we live in

love itself. How comes it, then, to pass that we are so cold, that we have an immense fire within us, and yet do not burn? If we considered deeply these words of our Divine Master, "I am come to cast fire upon earth, and what will I but that it be kindled" (Luke xii. 49); if we entered into the designs of this God of love, we would neither labor for nor think of aught, but how to increase this conflagration, and to light up this divine fire where it does not yet burn. Such would be the object of our most ardent desires. Yes, we could not avoid crying out, according to the example of a certain saint, Let us love, let us truly love this God alone in three persons. Let us, then, love God alone, whatever happens, and whatever it may cost us, and let us not be so unfortunate as to divide our hearts and affections. Let us love him in all His creatures, in all our actions, in all our sufferings, in all that we are; let us love Him unceas-

ingly, in all places and times, during our life, and at our death, that loving him may be our occupation for eternity.

He who loves God possesses Him, and, consequently, enjoys a sovereign and infinite God, which renders him perfectly happy, though he were the poorest and most abandoned of men, and loaded with all kinds of misery. We ought to reflect profoundly that God is the element of our souls, that He is the divine place of their habitation; because immediately proceeding from God as their principle, they tend toward Him as to their centre and end. A fish would perish if taken out of its element, though it were placed in a basin of gold, ornamented with precious stones; so will man, if he seeks out of God his consolation and repose.

May the Lord be blessed for giving us a knowledge of these truths. The royal Prophet says he set the Lord al-

ways before him, and that, therefore, his "heart was glad," his "tongue sang for joy," and, moreover, his "flesh reposed in hope." (Ps. xv. 9.) And afterwards he adds, that this is the way of life, that "the sight of God fills" him "with joy," and that "the delights it inspires have no end." (Ps. xv. ii.) Oh, how delightful, how glorious to preserve one's self continually in the presence of so good a Master.

A PRAYER TO THE MOST HOLY TRINITY.

O my God! Father, Son and Holy Ghost, who penetrate our hearts, who fill the universe by the immensity of your being, and bear us in your bosom, as the most tender of parents; spirit infinitely perfect, first principle of all things, in whom and by whom I exist, who are my centre and my only support, how blind have I not been in living so

long without scarcely thinking of you, although continually in the presence of your Divine Majesty. You were in all the places in which I was, O Lord; you heard all my words, you witnessed all my actions, you penetrated my most secret thoughts, you saw my heart, and I reflected not thereon. I walked, I spoke, I acted, I did all those things without remembering you, without a feeling of respect or love for you, as if I had not known, or had forgotten that you had given me a soul which can, at all times and at all places, enjoy you in secret by tending to you alone, and by giving to external occupations only the attention which it can not refuse them. What a happiness is not this, my God! but how little is it known by the greater part of men. So much occupied and defiled are they by their affection to creatures that there is no place left for you in their minds or hearts. For *my* part, O my adorable Creator, I shall render

you henceforward the love and respect which I owe you, and will apply myself seriously to the practice of your holy presence. I desire to renounce this sensual, carnal, exterior life, in order to live the life of the spirit—that interior, supernatural and all divine life which your blessed Son came to communicate to men. Through His merits grant this grace to me, and to all who shall employ the means laid down for that purpose in this work, that being by them filled with your grace and spirit here, we may one day glorify you in Him and by Him in heaven. Amen.

PART II.

CHAPTER I.

In what the exercise of the presence of God consists.

The holy exercise of the presence of God, so much recommended by the Sacred Scriptures and by the Fathers of the Church, consists in a simple but affectionate remembrance of God present within us. I say a simple idea or remembrance, for it does not require any representation or image, any reasoning or effort of the mind, or labor of the imagination, which might injure the head or cause other inconvenience. So far from this view of God being a hindrance to our occupations, it must, on the contrary, render them more easy and more agreeable, as would the presence of a good father, a kind friend, a beneficent king, for whom we would be obliged to labor, and whom alone we

would wish to please. And, then, since as Christians we should do all, even our most indifferent actions, for God, and as nothing can be done worthy of Him, or which can merit heaven, without a particular grace, why is it that, knowing that God continually beholds us and is always ready to succor us, we are so slothful or so negligent as not to interrupt for some moments, our commerce with creatures to turn our minds to Him, and thus, insensibly acquire, like many holy souls, a facility in walking always in his presence, without being distracted from it by the most embarrassing occupations?

This remembrance of God is not only simple, but amorous and affectionate; not because it consists in forming particular acts of love of God, but because it is always accompanied with a secret desire to please Him, to adore Him, to serve Him, which is nothing else, after all, but a mark of our love and of our anx-

iety to unite and to attach ourselves to Him; and, also, with a resolute will to remain so faithful to Him as to be able to say with the apostle, "Neither tribulation, nor distress, nor famine nor persecution shall ever separate me from the charity of Christ." (Rom. viii. 35.)

1. We have said, in the definition of this exercise, that it was a simple remembrance of God present within us; not that we may not consider Him as present in all places, but because to regard Him as present within ourselves induces more recollection and has been greatly esteemed by many saints.

2. The exercise of the presence of God is, also, a simple regard which elevates, applies and unites us to God. St. Paul expresses it in these terms, "our conversation is in heaven." (Phil. iii. 20.) This regard or this look upon God, should be accompanied with peace and sweetness, the ordinary effect

of our confidence in the goodness of this amiable Father, ever attentive to our necessities. So far, then, from employing in this exercise a violent application, which would only render it difficult, it suffices to cast the eye of the soul frequently on this adorable object, in humble hope that He himself will render our attention to Him continual; and, after having done what depends on us, to turn to him gently from time to time, saying in ourselves, O my soul, how hast thou been able to remain so long without thinking of God!

3. The exercise of the presence of God is, also, a secret invocation of His help and assistance. We might say it consists in often recurring to God, to induce Him to act with us, to fill us with His spirit, to be our light in darkness, our strength in weakness, our consolation in trouble, our all in all, saying with the royal Prophet, "O God, incline unto my aid; O Lord, make haste

to help me." (Ps. lxix.) This holy being, as he tells us, sought in God what the world unsuccessfully seeks in creatures: "I set the Lord always in my sight," says he, "for He is at my right hand that I be not moved. Therefore my heart hath been glad, and my tongue hath rejoiced; moreover, my flesh also, shall rest in hope." (Ps. xv. 8, 9.)

4. The exercise of the presence of God is, again, a respectful silence before the majesty of a God present, so that, penetrated with the sentiments of the same holy prophet, we exclaim, "Lord, I am as nothing before thee." (Ps. xxxvi. 7.) At other times the soul holds itself in that profound silence before God which St. Dionysius says is the praise most suited to His infinite majesty. It was the practice of this great saint, in his most intense ardors, as well as of other eminent servants of God, having no words to testify their

gratitude, or to express what they saw of the greatness of God, to content themselves with admiring and adoring it, in the disposition to do all they could to acknowledge His goodness, and thus enter into that profound annihilation in His divine presence which was a true and real sacrifice of their minds and hearts. Such is that interior worship, that adoration "in spirit and truth," which our Lord speaks of in St. John (iv. 24); this respectful silence being nothing but the calm of the mind and heart from that agitation to which the greater part of Christians are never more subject than in time of prayer, and from which they cannot be freed without the practice of the divine presence.

What an error, then, is it not to make devotion consist in a multitude of prayers, often recited without attention to what we say, or to whom we speak, and without listening to what He

speaks in us. St. Theresa says it is a great mistake, and that we lose considerable in being so anxious to say much to God as to neglect hearkening to what he says to us. "Do you think," says she, "that God is silent when we speak to Him?" No, indeed. He speaks *to* our hearts every time that we address Him *from* our hearts.

St. Augustine thus explains this communication between God and us. The eternal Word and the soul have their particular language, by means of which they hold mutual intercourse. The language of the Word is that goodness which induces Him to communicate Himself to the soul who speaks to Him. The language of the soul is that desire and that fervor which leads her to speak to and hear God. All this is effected in an admirable manner, and almost instantaneously, by its respectful silence.

5. The exercise of the presence of

God is, moreover, an interior abandonment which the soul makes of itself and its interests to the good pleasure of this Sovereign Master, in whom she places all her confidence, saying with David, "my lots, O Lord, are in thy hands." (Ps. xxx. 16.)

We are convinced by faith that we are always in the hands of God, the apostle having said that "it is in Him we live, move and have our being," &c. (Acts xvii. 28); and our Lord having declared that without His knowledge not a single hair falls from our head (Luke xxi. 18); yet we live as if we depended solely on ourselves, and, by a detestable ingratitude, we pass almost our whole life without thinking of that providential hand from which we receive so many gifts.

The exercise of which we speak is the remedy for this evil. A soul who remembers the presence of God is full of gratitude and confidence, and offers

herself unceasingly to God, with all her interests and concerns, by this single word which she pronounces interiorly. All is yours, my God; I wish for nothing but you; you are my treasure and my all; or by any other words which grace inspires; and little as this seems, it helps to withdraw her from creatures and makes her repose in God.

6. The exercise of the presence of God may also be said to consist in a perfect submission of will to His, as our Lord himself teaches us in this petition of His own prayer, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." (Luke xxii. 42). One such act can recall a soul from its wanderings among creatures, and subject and elevate it to God, provided it be faithful enough to repeat it as often as He inspires; and thus we may insensibly acquire the happy disposition of doing without pain the will of God in all things.

7. In fine, the exercise of the pres-

ence of God may be termed a supplement to the sight of God, and it should produce in the soul who practices it something like to what the vision of God produces in the blessed. O my Lord and my God, what a consolation would it not be for us in our exile if we thought of you. And if, like Cain, we are fugitives from your presence and exiles from your heart, what reason have we not to fear, lest we become the prey of our passions, which are our most dangerous enemies.

But those who are faithful to this holy exercise do not content themselves with merely regarding God, they apply themselves carefully to hear His orders, in order to execute them like the holy Psalmist, who says, "To thee have I lifted up my eyes who dwellest in the heavens. As the eyes of the servants are on the hands of their masters, so are our eyes to our Lord God, until He have mercy on us." (Ps. cxxiii.)

Among the foregoing ideas of this holy exercise each one can select that which suits him best, and attach himself to its practice with perseverance, despite of the difficulties which he may meet at the outset. It should be remarked, according to F. Gonnelieu, of our Society, there is a presence of God for the mind, and another for the heart, as David says, "My heart, O Lord, hath spoken to you, my spirit hath sought you."

The presence of God for the mind is an actual, reiterated and continued view of God, looking upon and residing within us, which view animates us to regulate the movements of our hearts, to vanquish our passions, repress our humor, purify our intentions, and separate ourselves from all that can remove us from God. It is a recollection of the mind in God which attracts His graces and benefits, supports us in temptations, consoles us in afflictions,

renders our actions supernatural, our days full of merits, and our life worthy of God.

This holy practice is the proper employment of a Christian, except love in God and for God; according to St. Augustine, he can no more live a supernatural life than his body could live a natural one without respiration. Hence, it is plain that a general act of the divine presence, formed in the morning, does not continue except it be frequently renewed, the lightness of our minds and the inclination of our hearts being proofs sufficiently strong of the facility with which we may pass from seeking God to seeking ourselves, and from ourselves to our passions.

But, to resume our definition of the presence of God for the mind, it is an attending to the designs of God, to enter on them with courage; to His desires, to content them with eagerness; to His graces, to correspond to them

with fidelity. It is a forgetfulness of all that has no reference to God, a separation from all that gratifies the heart and the senses against the commands of God, a continual death to all human and irregular satisfactions; to find no pleasures but in what pleases God, as David says: "My soul refused to be comforted; I remembered God and was delighted." (Ps. lxxvi. 4.) It is an interior homage which the mind renders to God, a divine commerce which enriches us with the gifts of His grace and obtains for us those of His glory; which, by uniting us to God, renders us participators in His plenitude, makes His love our ruling passion, and, in fine, makes us act in loving, and love in acting, and makes us die as we have lived, in thinking of and loving God.

That Christian who has forgotten his Creator and his Saviour during his life must find himself in a lamentable state

at death. It is a frightful thing to appear before a God whom he has little known and scarcely at all loved. Preserve me, O Lord, from this misfortune. No, I shall never be tired of renewing the remembrance of your adorable presence, in order to elevate myself to you by confidence, and to attach myself to you by love.

But the presence of God in the mind is not enough; the heart must be fixed and riveted in Him by perpetually tending to Him, and by constant vigilance in obeying and loving Him. This is that continual prayer recommended in the Gospel, for we can not be always actually thinking of or speaking to God, but we can, and we should hold our hearts always turned toward Him, by a constant will to please and love Him. To do always what He wishes, to enter into all His designs, to make His good pleasure a law to one's self, is to pray always, to love always, to preserve al-

ways the presence of God. But as we have said that the presence of God to the mind must be often renewed, so also must this of the heart; otherwise, it would soon be diverted from him by the artifices of self-love.

After all, this tendency of the heart to God is the more necessary, as it alone helps to fix the mind in Him. The reason why we *think* so rarely of this divine Being is because we have him so seldom present to our minds, and that our hearts are empty of Him and attached to creatures. As Magdalen did not allow herself to be so taken with the dazzling appearance of the angels who appeared at the sepulchre as to give up the search of "Him whom her soul loved," so a heart which sincerely tends to God stops not, nor attaches itself to any thing created—nothing supplying to it in any degree the place of God.

The fire of divine love is ever in mo-

tion, always carrying the heart toward heaven, purifying it from its irregular attachments, and disposing it to enter into the possession of the heart of God Himself; hence the necessity of lighting up this sacred fire every morning, and of nourishing it during the day by frequent elevations of the soul, never suffering it to be extinguished by sin, or cooled by negligence or tepidity. By this means, the heart, ceasing to be itself, feels transported into God, and continues under the empire of His good pleasure. If a person perceive that he has withdrawn himself from this holy dominion by voluntary infidelities, he should at once detest them, and, despite of his repugnance, submit himself to it anew, with a purpose never again to withdraw from it.

After having spoken of the practice of holy recollection of the mind and heart in God, it is necessary for a Christian who intends to sanctify him-

self to be convinced of its necessity. The first proof is these words of our Lord, "God is a spirit, and they who adore Him should adore Him in spirit and in truth," for to adore God in spirit is to recollect one's self in His presence, to render Him internal homage, to join to one's prayers attention of mind and devotion of heart, to make frequent aspirations to heaven, and to frequently elevate one's thoughts to God; in fine, it is to devote one's mind and heart to render to this divine Being that interior worship and adoration which Jesus Christ requires from all Christians in these other words, used on the same occasion, "The hour cometh, and now is, when the true adorers shall adore the Father in spirit and in truth." (John iv. 23.)

The second proof is what our Lord said of the Jews, "This people honor me with their lips, while their heart is far from me." (Matt. xv. 18.) For

these words at once convince us that a purely external worship is an abomination before God.

Exercises of piety, then, in order to be sanctifying, should be performed with a mind recollected in the presence of God and a heart occupied solely with the desire of pleasing Him. It is very difficult to succeed without studying Jesus Christ, the perfect model of the interior life, without applying one's mind to know Him, and one's heart to love Him. It is thus alone we can form Him in our hearts, be animated by His spirit, and live by His life.

But address yourself to this divine Master, with all the fervor of which you are capable, for the graces necessary for this end, and endeavor to conceive, by all He has done for you, what you should endeavor to do for Him.

PRAYER TO THE INCARNATE WORD IN THE WOMB OF MARY.

Adorable Jesus! who didst remain during nine months in the womb of your blessed Mother, hidden from and unknown to the world; I regard you in this state as the model of the interior life of a Christian, a life despised by men, but honored by angels, and forming even angels on earth by the wonderful changes it operates. O infinite love of my God, how incomprehensible are you, and how frightful is our blindness. You have espoused or weakness and miseries to gain our hearts, and we refuse to conceal, to hide, to lose ourselves happily in you, thereby to get rid of our evils and enrich ourselves with your treasure. Yes, my Saviour! it is in those who love this interior life that

you continually consummate the work of redemption, and it is in them you incarnate yourself in some sort every day in a spiritual manner, and thus, whilst they lodge you in their hearts, you live in theirs that hidden life which you lived on earth.

Ah, my Saviour! may I ask one favor? It is that I, and all who read this work, may enter at once on the practice of this interior life, and faithfully persevere in it. May we, for this purpose, renounce ourselves and all creatures, and die to the carnal and sensual life of worldlings, to live hidden with Christ in God. Amen.

CHAPTER II.

On the Excellence and Utility of this Holy Exercise of the Presence of God.

Fidelity to grace is not so much a particular virtue as the efficient cause, the mother, nurse, spirit and life of all

virtues: it is the effect of good desires, the increase of holy resolutions, the application of all the means of salvation, the pledge of perseverance, and the seal of predestination. It is this fidelity which makes saints; no one has ever become perfect without obeying the inspirations of the Holy Ghost.

But how have they acquired this fidelity, except by often remembering, and being attentive to the presence of God. The greater part of Christians lead a life wholly exterior, employing themselves in gratifying the senses and passions, and never entering into themselves to hear the voice of God, or to observe the movements of His grace; but, on the contrary, are deaf to the one, and despise and reject the other. This was the precise cause of the destruction of Jerusalem, and the reprobation of the Jewish people. "All these evils shall come upon you," said our Lord, when weeping over the un-

PACIFIC LIBRARY

happy city, "because you have not known the time of your visitation." The same cause still produces the same unhappy effects—"With desolation is all the earth made desolate, because there is no one who thinks in his heart." (Jerem. xii. 11.) Few recollect themselves in the presence of God; few reflect on the truths of holy faith. Almost all Christians, after a few vocal prayers, said with precipitation, and, perhaps, a mass heard without attention or devotion, give themselves full liberty the rest of the day to think, and say, and desire, and do what their inclinations prompt, without regarding God more than if He did not exist for them; without restraining or renouncing themselves in any thing. To give nothing to God or their salvation, which may cost them any pain or difficulty, is the description of devotion practiced by most Christians, and which is, indeed, the way of perdition.

This life, wholly sensual, and more Pagan than Christian, is directly opposed to that which is led by the true servants of God, who, as David says, "have their eyes always fixed on their Master, to know His divine will." It appears that this holy being, who had the happiness of being according to God's own heart, was in this happy disposition, that he held himself always in the presence of God, and often recurred to Him by those lively and ardent effusions of faith and confidence which we admire in his Psalms.

1. But let us consider the advantages of this holy exercise. St. Ambrose says it is a sovereign means to avoid sin; and St. Thomas affirms that it would be impossible for us to offend God deliberately if we remembered that His eyes are always fixed on us.

2. The presence of God is, also, according to St. Basil, a powerful support in time of temptation. Remem-

ber, says St. Augustine, that God regards you as a captain regards his troops in the field of battle, holding in one hand graces to help and assist you in your recurring to Him, and in the other, crowns to recompense you for the victories gained over His and your enemies.

The same saint also says that the most efficacious means to destroy in ourselves the empire of sin and satan, is joy of heart in the divine presence, because a person may find paradise in all places, provided the heart be united to God.

The pious author of the Imitation of Jesus Christ says, that "he to whom all things are one, who sees all things in one, that is, in God, can be always content;" and elsewhere he says, "to walk with God within one's self, and not to be entangled with any external affections, is the mark of an interior and spiritual man."

3. The exercise of the presence of God is, if faithfully practiced, the shortest way to attain perfection. When God is present, says a holy doctor, every thing else disappears, and the soul remains alone with Him. What a happiness for this soul! Those who are enlightened by grace know by happy experience that one quarter of an hour spent thus is better than whole days employed in external affairs, which are useful only inasmuch as they lead us to God. O that all Christians, as the devout De Bernierres, the author of the Interior Christians, used to say, were deeply penetrated with this truth.

Some say, he adds, they have nothing to employ them. But how can this be true, since they have always labor through which they may unite themselves to God, and make Jesus Christ dwell in them permanently by the life of faith? A Christian should say, I, indeed, have much to do; God is with-

in me, and I must entertain Him; He fills me, I must embrace Him, and unite myself to him, since He permits me this high, this unspeakable favor.

Elsewhere the same holy man says, God is in all creatures, and the soul can find and unite herself to Him in them; but He is present in the bottom of her heart as in a sacred temple, where he resides with complacency, if she be faithful to Him. It is there he makes himself be enjoyed by his creature in a manner which astonishes the angels.

This is what the author of the Imitation expresses in those charming words, which deserve to be engraved on all hearts: "Turn yourself to God with your whole heart, forsake this miserable world, and your soul shall find rest. Learn to despise exterior things, and to give yourself to the interior, and you will see that the kingdom of God is peace and joy in the Holy Ghost, which is not given to the wicked. Jesus Christ

will come unto you and show you His divine sweetness if you prepare Him a worthy mansion within you. All the glory and beauty which the celestial Spouse loves is in the interior of the soul, and it is there He takes His delight. He Himself says, 'If any one love me, he will keep my words, and we will come unto him, and take up our abode with him.' (John xiv. 23.) Open, then, your heart to Jesus, and deny admittance to all others. When you possess Jesus, you are rich, and He alone suffices. He himself will take care of all that concerns you, and not disdain to act in your regard as a faithful friend and a vigilant guardian, without your being obliged to depend on men, who are always inefficient and powerless, if God make not use of them to succor you."

4. The exercise of the presence of God wonderfully augments our faith, fortifies our hope and inflames our love.

The best means to acquire a lively faith being to think often of God; to increase our hope, to regard Him often as our Father, and to remember that we are not only formed by Him, but that we are continually in His essence and in the bosom of His Providence; to inflame our love, to turn our eyes often toward Him, because we thus attract on us His divine looks, which, like so many burning sparks, enkindle within us the fire of his charity.

5. This holy exercise, moreover, imparts a wonderful facility in the practice of the different virtues, for it can be said with truth that a soul who holds herself in the presence of God with respect and love, at one and the same moment adores Him, loves Him, thanks Him, abandons herself to and humbles herself before Him. This is what made St. Basil say, if you wish to do well what you perform, persuade yourself that God beholds you.

6. If we want another proof of the sovereign excellence of this exercise, we have it in the words spoken by the Lord Himself to Abraham: "'Walk before me and be perfect,' which are equivalent to His saying, keep yourself in my presence and you will be a saint. Indeed, a person who does so, thereby lives with God, in God, and by God, in which perfection consists. He lives with God by an almost unceasing conversation with him; he lives in God, seeking in Him alone His peace and repose; he lives by God, since this interior and familiar intercourse renders God the food and life of his mind and heart.

As a certain holy person exclaims, what a happiness to be always in God, but, alas, how little is this happiness known! He is a sun who shines day and night over us and within us, and we will not open our eyes to regard or look upon Him; in the splendor of His light we are buried in darkness, and

amid the fire and flames of His love we are frozen with cold.

But, to animate you more powerfully to this holy exercise, consider the effects it produces in souls who faithfully practice it. They know God and themselves far differently from what they previously did. Having their eyes always fixed on God, they see themselves in Him as in a resplendent mirror, in which all their deformity is manifested. The purity of God shows them their least defilement; the sanctity of God their smallest imperfection; the fidelity of God their least infidelity. They become firmly persuaded that all that the world esteems is but vanity, and merits not a single thought. They say, in all sincerity and with the strongest conviction, God is all, the creature is nothing.

These happy souls are remarkable for a great simplicity, which causes them to regard God purely in all

things. They have that "simple eye," that purity of intention, spoken of in the Gospel—those eyes of the dove, for which the spouse is praised in the Canticles. They seek not their own interest, or pleasure, or satisfaction even in this holy exercise, their sole object being to attach and unite themselves to God. Their affections are like so many magnets, which, being turned from their centre by violence, are in continual motion until they regain it. These souls do not occupy themselves unnecessarily with the things of earth. Every thing but God appears insipid and distasteful to them, as well as to St. Paul, who says that "he counted all things as loss that he might gain Jesus Christ." (Phil. iii. 8.)

The faithful practice of this exercise for a considerable time renders a person quite spiritual. By force of thinking of God and tending toward Him the soul becomes, as it were, divine and

is rendered like to Him; for if we adopt the manners and sentiments of those with whom we often converse, if a painter who attentively regards an original, produces a perfect copy, and if, in fine, the continual sight of snow renders some animals perfectly white, why should not a soul who applies herself continually to look upon and love God, become as like to Him as human weakness can permit. A person can not remain long in a place filled with perfumes without retaining their odor; nor can iron, if put in a burning furnace, fail, however black and heavy of its own nature, to take the color and qualities of fire; how, then, can we remain continually in the presence of God without participating in His divine qualities and being inflamed with His love?

A soul who has firmly resolved to remember God frequently, and to walk always in His sight, regards Him in the

bottom of her heart as her centre and true repose. She feels that out of Him she is in a state of violence, like a fish out of its element, or a bone out of its place; and as an experimental knowledge of the truth of these words of St. Augustine, "Thou hast made us, O Lord, for thyself, and our hearts are unquiet till they rest in thee."

What we have said of the great advantages accruing from this exercise should suffice to stir up the most indifferent to devote themselves to it; but lest any thing withhold them, we shall, in the next place, show the futility of the excuses which some allege, to dispense themselves from it, having first implored of God, through the intercession of the Holy Virgin, the grace to relish these holy truths.

PRAYER TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN.

O Holy Virgin! who, always occupied with the Divine Presence, have

merited to be saluted by an angel as full of grace; and who from that moment were filled with the Holy Ghost, and made the habitation of the Incarnate Word, obtain for me of my Adorable Saviour a great facility in thinking of Him frequently, and of constantly preserving His holy presence, that I may be one of those who worship Him in spirit and truth. Beg for me, also, O incomparable Virgin! a love of recollection, in order to imitate, as much as possible, that interior and hidden life which you led upon earth, and that continual union which you had with your Divine Son.

You were like Him continually penetrated with the view of the Eternal Father; you constantly adored and loved Him; your heart, while you abode on earth, was an interior heaven in which He took His delight.

Ask for me once more, and for all who may read this little book, the love

and fidelity necessary to enter on and persevere in this holy practice, in order that becoming your faithful imitators and true children on earth we may participate in your glory in heaven. Amen.

CHAPTER III.

A refutation of the false objections made to this holy exercise.

The first objection which we shall notice of those alleged against the presence of God is, that *this practice is not for every one.* To this we reply, that it is true some have more facility than others in keeping themselves in the Divine Presence; yet we would be strangely deluded in giving it up for such a pretext. Being sent into the world for no other end than to know, love and serve God, how can we acquit ourselves of these duties without frequently thinking of Him, and how can we think of Him without remembering

His presence? Why do the greater portion of mankind live in as profound a forgetfulness of God, as if they had no knowledge of His absolute dominion over them, the obligations they lie under to Him, and that He is present in all places, but because they do not take the trouble of reflecting on it attentively.

And, then, God is present to *all* without exception; therefore no one is exempt from the obligation of attending to Him and paying Him that tribute of respect and love which His majesty deserves and demands.

Second objection: *This exercise is too troublesome and too difficult.* A Christian ought to blush and be ashamed at making this objection. Is it, then, difficult to remember a God whom we find everywhere, who is incessantly doing us good, who holds in our regard the place of father, mother, brother, friend and spouse? What child would presume to say he could

not remember his father while he abode in his house, and need only raise his eyes to behold him? Should he not, on the contrary, say that he could not forget him? To be sure, it may be difficult to think without intermission of God, and to preserve continually His holy presence. We are ready to admit that this is a favor He does not grant to all; but to remember Him as often as possible, obdurate sinners alone can refuse to do, they having some participation already in the state of the damned in hell, who cannot bear the presence of an irritated God, from whom they can expect no mercy. But to sinners who wish to be converted, there is no object that can more powerfully lead them to the way of salvation than a God present. With much more reason may we say the just can have no more powerful stimulus to advance in grace and virtue.

Third objection: *It is sloth and lazi-*

ness which engage persons in practices of this sort. Nothing so false, nothing more unfounded than this objection, though sometimes put forward by persons making professions of virtue, but who have never properly understood what recollection is, and who believe they do nothing when they cease to act externally. In opposition to them we may say, with a holy servant of God, Divine idleness! little known by men who always wish to make a noise. Happy void! which makes us see our nothingness. Marvelous art! to die always to one's self, in order to live to Jesus Christ. Eloquent silence! where the soul speaks incessantly by the homage it renders to the Divinity. Charming empire over the passions! where the senses no longer occupy us. Tranquil desert! where we deprive ourselves of all to find all, and where we are never less alone than when we are by ourselves.

In effect, how can any one say that to adore God interiorly, annihilate one's self before His majesty, to abandon one's self to His holy will, to evince the desire of pleasing and loving Him more and more, can be idleness and loss of time? And yet it is in this the exercise of the divine presence consists. If there be any who, under pretense of practicing it, dispense themselves from the duties or their state, the fault lies with them, and not with this exercise, which by no means authorizes or inspires any deviation from duty; and, after all, these persons, though apparently recollected without, may be, and generally are, all dissipation within.

Nor does this exercise hinder; on the contrary, it helps us to make our prayer well—attention to the adorable Object whom we then address being one of the best dispositions we can bring to it. Those who are not accustomed to remember the presence of

God can have no recollection at prayer; and if, with much struggle, they endeavor to preserve themselves from yielding to willful distractions, they will not be able to preserve the advantages of it without attending to this holy exercise. It should, then, precede, accompany and follow our prayer.

Fourth objection: *The practice of the divine presence inspires vanity and presumption.* It is very easy to prove the sophistry of this argument. It is true, persons may be vain of this exercise; but can they not also draw motives of vanity from the holy communion, yet who will venture to say that it is communion which generates this vicious sentiment? And, then, it is by no means true that this exercise leads to self-esteem; on the contrary, it inspires humility, nothing being more efficacious for that end than the sight of the divine perfections and our comparative nothingness and misery. If any

thing were to be feared, it is that the soul might fall into discouragement, seeing its own innate corruption and the essential holiness and sanctity of the divine majesty.

Besides, a soul who practices this exercise becomes so holy that she can not fall into the least sin without at once perceiving and being interiorly reproved for it—without being immediately pressed to repair it by humbling herself before the divine majesty, just as a person blushes for, and regrets a little word he has inadvertently said against another whom he respects, when he thinks it will be related to him.

To show still more clearly how unfounded this objection is, we should remember that humility is a virtue more than human, and one which Jesus Christ alone may be strictly said to have practiced—glory and honor being essentially the Creator's due, abjection the portion of the creature, however

holy, in consequence of its intrinsic nothingness. It follows, that this virtue can only be learned by frequenting His school and uniting ourselves to Him, and thus acquiring His spirit and love which is formally opposed to the irregular love of ourselves, the source of our pride, as well as of our other irregularities. This can not be without keeping ourselves in His presence; and hence, instead of inspiring vanity and presumption, this holy practice leads to true humility.

Fifth objection: *Too much business and many embarrassments*, instead of being a reason against, is, on the contrary, a powerful one to devote one's self to the exercise of the divine presence. Having much to do, you want more grace and strength than those who have little; and then you should not abandon the care of your salvation, which is, after all, "the one thing necessary," above any other care, however

important. If your occupations be in the order of God, and of such a nature as not to allow you to think as often of Him as others who have more leisure, He will be satisfied with your good will, for He is so good that He is willing to make allowances for our business, and accommodates Himself to the duties which engage us. Provided, we turn our minds and hearts from time to time to Him, He is always ready to receive us, and takes a singular pleasure in beholding us leave the creature in spirit, though we do not forsake them exteriorly.

God has some true adorers in the world as well as in the cloister, and it depends on ourselves to be of the number. And though we may not succeed in this point in our state for several years, as others do in a much shorter time, it matters nothing, provided it be not our own fault. Our merits will be not less abundant, since the violence we

do ourselves will be the measure of our recompense.

The opposition arising from our occupations is no pretext for dispensing ourselves from this exercise. And, after all, is not the great God whom we adore, the author and approver of these occupations? And if so, why should they exclude His remembrance? Is it not in difficulties and distractions that we have a greater want of His light and assistance, as being then in more danger of offending Him?

Such are our answers to the objections raised by some to authorize their sloth, their self-love and pusillanimity in the practice of this exercise. If they be not satisfactory, if all we have said of its advantages be still insufficient to induce them to it, let them at least desire this happiness; let them humbly ask it of God, bewailing often before Him the dissipation in which they live, and acknowledging that it arises solely from

their own negligence, and let them raise their hearts to him as often as possible. By this means God, blessing their desires, will, finally, overcome by His grace and mercy the obduracy of their hearts, and will bind them so by the chains of His love, that they will ultimately find their greatest joy and delight in thinking of and reposing in Him alone.

PRAYER TO ST. JOSEPH.

O great saint! nursing father to Jesus Christ, admirable model and patron of the interior and hidden life to which I aspire, and which is the particular character of your sanctity, obtain for me of my divine Saviour the strength and vigilance necessary to establish myself solidly therein, that in imitating your fidelity in living unknown to the world, and being strictly united with Christ, I may reign eternally with you in heaven. **Amen.**

CHAPTER IV.

Means of acquiring the habit of preserving one's self in the presence of God.

The first means of acquiring a facility in preserving one's self in the divine presence is, *a firm resolution to give one's self entirely to God*, and to protest to Him often that we wish to belong to him without reserve. St. Francis de Sales, the great master of the Devout Life, required this of those whom he directed: "You do not forget your good purpose," he used to say to them, "Continue firm; we belong to God, and He is ours; our Lord is our true and faithful friend, and what more do we look for?" And truly did this great saint speak thus, for whatever privation of life or consolation we endure, if our Lord remains with us, we shall suffer nothing, since He is the author of grace and good, and one who will never forsake us, unless we compel Him by abandoning Him.

The second means is, *to try to perform our actions in the divine presence.* But this should be with sweetness and humility, in order to avoid a certain eagerness which spoils all, according to St. Francis, by casting us into trouble, nourishing confidence in ourselves, and producing so many desires that they stifle one another and remain unproductive. Besides, a person who would wish to acquire at once this holy habit, and who would do violence to his imagination, would become an annoyance to himself and to others. We should, then, content ourselves with humbly persevering in desiring and adopting the means conducive thereto, and leave the success entirely to God, who will be perfectly satisfied with our good will.

The third means is, *on falling into sin and imperfection, to present one's self before God to ask mercy and forgiveness, and not imitate those whom*

self-love renders miserable on falling into a defect, until they can recur to their confessors, and who are not after having done so one whit better. Our faults themselves should not remove us from the presence of God by chagrin or inquietude; they should rather contribute to unite us more closely to Him, by prompting us to cast ourselves into His arms, and cling to Him more firmly, like a little child who, after making a false step, attaches himself more earnestly to the bosom of his father.

The fourth means, and one which very much facilitates this exercise is, after the example of the saints, *to enter into and seek God simply within ourselves.* St. Augustine says in his Manual: "Fly, then, O man, for a little time, thy vain occupations, and renounce the importunate wanderings of thy mind; disengage thyself from thy solicitudes, and at thy leisure think of

and take thy repose in God. Enter into the cabinet of thy heart, and expelling all but thy Creator, and that which can help thee to find Him, close the door and say to Him, with all thy soul, 'My heart hath said to thee, my face hath sought thee;' thy face, O Lord, will I still seek. 'Teach, then, my poor heart, O my amiable Master, how I can find you. Tell me if you are not within it, whither shall I go to seek you.'"

St. Theresa, in her work entitled, "The Way of Perfection," regarding her soul as an interior heaven, in which Jesus Christ takes His delight and makes Himself known and loved, says: "Let those who are able to shut themselves up in the little heaven of their souls, where He resides who has made it, and created the world, believe that they are in an excellent way, and will ultimately drink at the fountain of life, for they get over much ground in a short time."

St. Catherine, of Sienna, considered her heart as an oratory in which God dwelt: she remained there with Him amid the embarrassment and dissipating business with which her parents overwhelmed her, to prevent her attending to spiritual exercises, and thereby changed her particular devotions into a continual prayer.

To facilitate this recollection, a person may still make use of the following ideas: to hold himself in silence before the divine majesty, immolating himself to this God present in us, either as a spouse lovingly regarding Jesus Christ, or as a statue placed in a niche merely to please its owner, or as a penitent Magdalen at the foot of the cross, or a Mary listening at the feet of Jesus to His divine lessons.

What, asks St. Francis de Sales, did St. Mary Magdalen at the feet of her Master? She listened to His divine work in profound tranquility; she

spoke not, wept not, prayed not, sighed not, acted not. What, then, did she do? She received the words of Jesus, she collected from his lips the myrrh of sweetness, which distilled from them drop by drop; and this Divine Spouse, pleased with the amorous repose of His beloved, reproved Martha who wished to awake her, saying, in her defense, that "she had chosen the better part, and that it should not be taken from her."

It may often happen that, however desirous we may be to remain in the presence of God, we shall be wearied with distraction, and even sometimes annoyed with disgusts; but this can not injure our design to remain there only to please Him, and sacrifice ourselves to Him, and not to gratify our self-love, which wishes to feel satisfaction in works of piety, as well as in other things unconnected with it.

The fifth means of preserving the

divine presence is, *to call it to mind in the morning on awakening;* in opening the eyes of the body to open those of the mind, to behold God present with us and adore him interiorly, and to preserve this view until we commence our prayer, making use of the following or similar words to arrest the vivacity of our minds: "My eyes are opened, O Lord, only to contemplate your adorable face. How good you are to those who seek you. I value one glance of yours more than all the goods and honors of the earth. Woe is me that my sojourning is prolonged: I shall be satisfied only when thy glory shall appear."

The sixth means is, *never to commence a prayer without placing one's self in the presence of God, and adoring Him interiorly with profound respect*, saying, with Jacob: "The Lord is here; how awful is this place;" or, with Abraham, "I will, who am

but dust and ashes, speak to my Lord;" or, with Samuel, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth;" or, with David, "Lord, I am as a beast before you;" or, with the Publican, "Lord, be merciful to me a sinner." If this were attended to, persons would not speak to God, either in private or public, with that ridiculous precipitation, which being remarked by heretics—particularly in boys who undertake to serve Mass—is made by them a subject of raillery and derision.

How opposite to such conduct was that of a holy religious man whom St. John Climacus speaks of. "Observing one day," writes this saint, "that one of the monks was more attentive than the rest in chanting the office, and that he seemed, particularly on commencing the hymns, by the change of his countenance, as if speaking to some one; I asked him the cause." To which he replied, "At the commencement of

the office, Father, I am accustomed to call my heart, and mind, and thoughts before me, and say to them earnestly, 'Come, let us adore and fall down before the Lord who made us, because He is the Lord our God, we are His people, and the sheep of his pasture.'" (Ps. xciv. 6, 7.)

St. Chrysostom says, When you go to prayer, imagine that you enter the celestial court where the King of Glory is seated on a throne glittering with stars, and encompassed with myriads of angels who all have their eyes fixed on you; for, as St. Paul says, we are made a spectacle to the world, and to angels, and to men. (I Cor. iv. 9.)

St. Bernard gives us this important advice, which he supported by his own advice. When you enter the church, or go to prayer, say in yourself, stay outside, ye vain thoughts and irregular affections, and thou, my soul, enter into

the joy of thy Lord that thou mayest know and accomplish His will.

The seventh means of preserving the presence of God is, *to represent to one's self that our Lord prays with us, and to endeavor to pray with Him and by Him.* This can be easily done, particularly when reciting the Pater Noster, our Lord himself having pronounced this prayer with us in the person of His disciples. This was St. Theresa's custom, and experiencing its utility, she recommends it to all.

The eighth means is, *frequently during the day to make some pious aspiration,* either to preserve or regain the presence of God.

St. Bonaventure thus speaks of this holy practice: "The acts by which we should raise our hearts to God in the holy exercise of His presence are, certain inflamed desires of our hearts, ardent and loving sighs by which we invoke God, tender and pious move-

ments of the will by which, as with spiritual wings, we fly to and reach God; and (continues this saint) just as we breathe, quite indeliberately, thus sometimes, almost imperceptibly, the soul forms these acts which unite it to God and bind it more strictly to Him."

The ninth means is, *when lying down at night to endeavor to withdraw the heart and thought from creatures*, and make them repose in God, saying, with the royal prophet, "In peace, in the self-same, I will sleep and will rest." (Ps. iv. 9); or, Lord, into thy hands I commend my spirit. My God, protect me under the shadow of thy wings; may my flesh, O Lord, so sleep in thee that my mind may ever watch to thee.

The tenth means is, *often to read authors who treat of the presence of God, and of the interior life*, as St. Theresa, St. Francis de Sales, De Ber-

niere's Interior Christian, and many others, who have spoken of it with great attention and after much experience.

All these means will wonderfully assist us in recollecting our minds in God, and making them turn to Him when they have strayed. And they are necessary, for though we may easily form the resolution of keeping ourselves in the divine presence, and though at first sight it appears easy, yet our great habit of allowing ourselves to be carried away by the first object that presents itself, our natural love of liberty and the gratification of the senses, form great obstacles to this holy practice, and compel us to say, with the apostle, "I feel in my body another law contradicting the law of my mind." (Rom. vii. 23.) We should, then, strive to gain insensibly what we can not attain all at once, expecting more from the fidelity we evince in adopting

these little means than from great resolutions; confidently hoping that God will enable us to preserve His presence after we shall have sought it with perseverance. Then what at first gave us much pain by the restraint it required, will be the subject of our joy and consolation.

But, as according to St. Theresa, it is necessary to employ continually a holy modesty, to recall our minds from their wanderings, and to re-establish them in sweet intercourse with our God, it remains for us to speak of certain little daily practices which succeed with many. For example, to recite some short prayer with a great deal of recollection and fervor when the clock strikes. If a person be in the country, or where there is no clock, he could stick a pin in his sleeve, or place some other mark before him, to remind him of God's holy presence. The sight of an image or picture, or church, can also

serve to raise the mind to God; and here let us observe that on passing the latter no Christian should omit saluting our Lord Jesus, who is really present there in the most holy sacrament. The verdure of the fields, the brightness of the sun, the lustre of the stars, should also remind one of Him that created them. When a person finds himself in a numerous assembly, he could salute the angel guardian of those present, and unite with them in rendering to God His homage and adoration; on awaking in the night it would be well to remember Him "who dwells in light inaccessible," and unite with so many religious persons who are then employed in singing His praises, or with the angels who are adoring Him in heaven, or with our Lord in the holy sacrament, who by His condition of victim continually renders to His Father that honor which is worthy of Him. Another useful practice, and one

adopted in some religious communities, and even in some families, is to kneel at every hour to adore the most sacred Trinity every where present. The Chartreuse Fathers, a religious order founded by St. Bruno, on receiving a visit, commence the conversation by prayer; such was, also, the practice of the primitive Christians. Woe to us who have so much degenerated from their spirit and fervor.

Some may think these little practices too great a restraint, but it is so great an honor for such as we are to be allowed to regard and entertain our God, and there is nothing we ought not to do to render ourselves worthy of it. We should withdraw our minds from creature whose presence deprives us of that of our Creator; renounce those attachments which engage our hearts and hinder them from ascending freely to God, and resolve to bear with patience the importunity arising from dis-

tractions, and the annoyance proceeding from the privation of sensible consolation, to which we may be subjected, as it often happens that in time the divine presence ceases to be so perceptible as at first. But faith should suffice us; and then, if we consider the assiduity with which courtiers labor to obtain a favorable look or gracious word from their sovereign, we shall find that our pains in preserving the presence of God are nothing in comparison.

We shall now see the obstacles which generally hinder us from profiting by this exercise, after having first implored the intercession of a great patroness of the interior life.

PRAYER TO ST. THERESA.

O great saint, who hast had so much zeal for our progress in the science of prayer, and who has left us thereon such excellent advice, in my sincere desire to advance in it, and that holy exercise

which mainly contributes to it, I turn to thee and beseech thee to obtain for me by thy prayers the light and grace I stand in need of to persevere in practicing it. Beg of that Divine Master who has so abundantly filled thee with the spirit of this holy exercise, and who has, through thy writings, manifested its necessity and advantages to the world, that all who read this little work may devote themselves to its practice with such fidelity and love as to become His adorers in spirit and truth, and thereby be participators in thy happiness. Amen.

CHAPTER V.

Obstacles to the practice of the Divine Presence.

After having spoken of the means of advancing in the holy exercise of the presence of God, it is now time to treat of its principal impediments, which are pride, self-love, attachment to creatures, immortification of the mind,

heart and senses, fondness for talking, curiosity, and involving ourselves in useless or unnecessary business. But let us speak of them in detail:

1st. *Pride*, the first impediment, being a revolt of the creature against the Creator, and a rapine which we commit on what belongs solely to God, removes us from His light, and produces in our souls that strange blindness which hinders us, though we have eyes, from seeing, greatly obscures our understanding, and prevents God from manifesting Himself to us.

2d. *The irregular love of ourselves* renders us the slaves of our passions and petty interests, and is not only the source of all our vices, because it inspires us to gratify self at the expense of the obedience we owe to God, but because it also leads us to banish Him from our minds and hearts, in order to follow with less restraint the inclination of corrupt nature. It is, besides, di-

rectly opposed to true charity, which tends to strip us of ourselves, in order to dispose us for an intimate union with God.

3d. Attachments to creatures is one of the greatest impediments; for, binding us to and retaining us among sensible objects, it absolutely hinders us from raising our minds to invisible things, and thereby hinders our flight toward God.

4th. *Immortification of the mind, and heart, and senses*, enslaves us to our irregular appetites, hinders us from reigning over ourselves, and from laboring as we should without relaxation "to subject the flesh to the spirit, and the spirit to God." Indeed, it is impossible that he who does himself no violence to overcome his passions can be master of himself, and be able to assure himself that he can arrest at pleasure the torrent of his perverse inclination, in order to fix his thoughts and affections on God.

5th. Fondness for talking without necessity so engages the powers of the soul that it can no longer preserve attention to God. As we cannot speak without occupying our memory and imagination with the species or images of what we have seen or heard, in order to enable our understanding to reason upon them, it follows that all the powers of the soul are thus engaged by the tongue, and on terrestrial things only; the same happens to it as to a vessel of water which ceases to be clear and transparent as soon as one stirs up the sediment which lies at the bottom. Silence has always been the mark of an interior soul; and as much as this virtue helps to preserve purity of mind and calm of heart, so much does the contrary vice produce darkness and trouble in both.

6th. *Curiosity*, or a desire to know what does not concern us and to pry into the actions of others, turns us

from the attention we ought to give to ourselves and our own defects, entertains lightness of mind, and favors self-love by exposing us to a vain complacency for ourselves and a criminal contempt for our neighbor. Moreover, directing us to every thing but God, it deprives us of the means of uniting ourselves to Him, and of having with Him that divine intercourse which is to those who enjoy it a source of the purest delights.

7th. In fine, useless and unnecessary occupation, leading us to diffuse ourselves on creatures, retaining us in dissipation, and robbing us of that time which should be employed in our duties, causes in our souls disorder and confusion, and destroys that peace and tranquility so necessary for conversing with God and preserving His holy presence.

PART III.

CHAPTER I.

Method and practice of conversing with God.

Conversation with those about us is one of the duties most ordinary and indispensable in human life. It is, however, subject to two inconveniences: the first, that those with whom we treat often disagree with us in humor or opinion; the other, that when intercourse with them pleases us most, it is dangerous or criminal.

Conversation with God is exempt from these dangers: there is not to be found in it either sin or weariness, innocence and joy being its usual accompaniments. If you wish to know it by your own experience, do with regard to it what the Holy Ghost in the sacred Scriptures teaches you.

1. God loves you; do you love Him?

His delight is to be with you, let yours consist in being with Him, thus passing your time as you hope to pass your eternity, in His amiable company.

Accustom yourself to speak to Him confidently as to your friend, never supposing that you should appear before Him as a hireling or a slave, who only thinks of flying from his master's presence to seek elsewhere his consolation and comfort.

Why has God created us to His own image and likeness, and authorized us to call Him Father, if He be not willing that we act toward Him as children? Why has He given us His own Son to be our mediator and the price of our ransom, but in order that we may become one with Him? Why, in fine, has this blessed Son given us His own flesh and blood in the holy sacrament of the altar, and promised to abide with us if we would remain in Him, but in order to banish from our

hearts slavish and servile fear, and to induce us to serve Him with love and confidence?

2. God, who is the most powerful and formidable of masters when He commands, wishes to be the most familiar of friends when He loves. In His private conversations with those souls who seek to please Him, His immensity proportions itself to the least as well as to the noblest and most exalted. Be not withheld, then, from communicating to Him your projects, your business, your fears, your hopes, and all that regards you, and this simply and confidentially, without quitting what you are employed in, just as you would to a tried friend when in his company. No doubt, God should be always treated with reverence and respect; but in the circumstances we are considering, that is, when He reminds us of, or makes His presence sensible by some interior movement, the best return and

the greatest tribute of respect we can pay Him is to speak to Him with all that confidence and affection which His own condescension inspires. To act otherwise would betray that false humility which St. Theresa condemns.

3. The prophet tells us that the Lord hears the desires of the poor, and that His ears hear the preparation of their hearts. (Ps. x. 17.)

Yes, without waiting till you go to Him, as soon as you sigh for His presence, this Divine Being presents Himself to you, bearing in His sacred hands graces and remedies proper for the miseries under which you labor. And here let us remark, that though present everywhere by His immensity, yet there are two places in which He particularly resides; the one is the empyreal heaven, where He communicates His glory to the angels and saints; the other the hearts of the just, in which He is present by His grace and the opera-

tions of His spirit, thus making of their solitudes a new terrestrial Paradise. Nor can we be astonished if God prefers for his habitation a soul in grace to all other places, since, after the angels, it is the masterpiece of His omnipotence, the purest and noblest emanation of His divinity, to which it is consequently less disproportioned. This was what made St. Bernard exclaim, "O Christian soul, see and acknowledge thy dignity!" and which made holy Job regret those happy years when God was in the secret part of his tabernacle and the Most High was with Him. (Job xxix. 4.)

And this happy society knows no interruption, God being of all friends the most faithful and inseparable. Others have their hours for separating; He never quits you. When the sun goes down He does not withdraw, says the wise man, but stands by your pillow to entertain you in the silence of night

with His inspirations, and to enable you to take a holy repose amid the celestial sweets of this interior conversation. He is present there in the morning, expecting to hear from you a word of confidence, and to be made the depositary of your first thoughts and designs.

Such being His care, fail not to acknowledge it. The moment you awake turn your mind and heart toward Him, saying with a holy prophet, "Lord, my soul hath desired thee in the night (Isaiah xxvi. 9); or you can not doubt, Lord, that I am yours without reserve, seeing that the first movement of my heart on awakening is one of joy and gratitude that you still love me, and have not forsaken me as my infidelities deserve."

4. You should be convinced that God regards as unknown to Him such matters as are not communicated to Him with confidence, or referred to

Him by love. As there are tears shed before Him by hypocritical penitents which He does not see, and persons, obdurate sinners, whom He declares He "knows not" (Matt. xxv. 12), so there are affairs of which we may in some manner say He is ignorant, as not being communicated to Him. Tell Him, then, all that regards your family, your joys and your sorrows; the virtues you want to acquire and the vices you wish to correct; in fine, tell Him all your wants, and those of your neighbor with which you may have become acquainted. It is true He knows these things already by His omniscience, from which nothing is hidden, but He wishes to know them from *you*, in order to regard them as affairs in which His love for you is particularly interested. If you do not consult Him on matters in which you are in doubt, you are likely to fall into the same difficulty with the Israelites who lost a great battle,

because as the Scripture says, they had not interrogated the mouth of the Lord. (Joshua ix. 14.)

5. And do not say that God would deem it unworthy of Him to attend to the detail of what passes in a family, or in the soul of a poor creature. It is true, as St. Chrysostom says, that the employment of the Most High on His throne is to think of the designs of His wisdom and sanctity; but with you, His only care is to think of you; His providence and love are only applied to your particular interests, and in those places where you are alone with Him He seems to be God but for you alone —to be omnipotent only to assist you, and infinitely amiable only to be loved by you. When, then, any strange accident has befallen you, observe not a gloomy silence in His regard, but come and make your complaints to Him with humility and respect; and if your confidence be great, this suffices to obtain a

deliverance from, or support under, your miseries. He is delighted on such occasions to hear you say: "See, O Lord, because I am troubled and full of bitterness (Thren. i. 20), all my desires are before thee, and my groaning is not hidden from thee." (Ps. xxxvii. 10.)

This Lord is pleased in seeing you cast yourself into His arms, and complain of the insufficiency or ingratitude of creatures, as holy Job did when he said, "My friends are full of words, my eye poureth out tears to God." (Job xvi. 21.)

6. Another mark of confidence very pleasing to the Almighty, is to confess your faults to Him on their commission. When you have fallen, defer not till you approach the tribunal of penance to declare to this amiable confident the misfortune which has happened you. Say to Him with David, "I have sinned, Lord, very much in what I have done

I have done exceedingly foolish." (II Kings xxiv. 10.) My God, I have just said an indiscreet word or done an action unworthy of my high destiny. I know not how I was so deluded, but I am sincerely sorry, and truly afflicted, because you have been thereby offended. However, if I have been less negligent and faithful than I should, you are not less merciful, but are still what your prophet describes you to be, "sweet and mild and plenteous in mercy."

As I know you do not wish me to abandon myself to dejection and sadness, I can only humble myself for my fault, and bewail it in your presence.

7. As to trivial faults, which occur almost every hour, do not disturb yourself for them; only beseech God to remember that He "alone is holy," and that you are by nature a sinner, and subject like a child to continual falls, which, as they arise from weakness, or inadvertence, it becomes His bounty

not to remember. Great God, might you say, when I fall, be mindful only of what you are by love. I acknowledge that you have much reason to complain of me, who, despite of so many graces, commit so many offenses; but it is my part to sigh and bewail them, and yours to raise me up, and take me into your arms, to dissipate my fears, and calm my disquietudes, by assuring me that you still love me, and have not ceased to be my God.

However, I should be wrong if I expected that my sins should not displease your infinite sanctity. They displease myself, and I entertain for them a sincere sorrow; but to excite your compassion, and to appease your wrath, consider, I beseech you, the state of your beloved Son on Calvary, and regard me sprinkled with the blood which He so copiously shed, and then I am sure you will have mercy on me, however great my demerits.

8. It is of the highest importance, Christian soul, to have recourse to this infinitely enlightened and faithful friend when embarrassed by some difficulty or obscured by some doubt. Say with Judith on these occasions, Lord, give words to my mouth, and counsel to my heart (ix. 18). Tell my soul what it should say, or what I should do: which of all the advices given and means proposed I should follow in this instance. Make known to me your will, and incline my heart to follow it. "I shall not err when your lamp shines over my head, and I walk by your light in darkness." (Job xxix. 3.)

9. Fear not, on finding yourself plunged in some adversity, to make to this Lord some tender reproaches. Complain to his love that He seems to abandon you, and despises your sighs and tears, saying with the holy psalmist, How long, O Lord, wilt thou depart far off from me; or, with Job, I cry to

thee, and thou hearest me not; I stand up and thou dost not regard me. Thou art changed to be cruel toward me, and in the hardness of thy heart thou art against me. But, ceasing these complaints, return again to sentiments of humility and confidence, exclaiming with the same, "Thou stretchest not forth thy hand, notwithstanding their consumption." Whatever you do with me, Lord, I know you do not intend to destroy me; it is your goodness which makes me suffer for my greater good. I submit, then, to your providence, which only entertains for me thoughts of peace and designs of love.

10. Do not occupy yourself so much with your own miseries as to become insensible to those of your neighbor. Tell your Lord what you know of them, and endeavor to draw from His sacred heart some grace and mercy for the relief of the afflicted or the conversion of sinners. I can not go any where, my

dear Master, might you say, without meeting persons in trouble, and my inability to succor them is to me a source of affliction. Many pious persons go to the rich to collect alms for the sick poor; and I address myself to you, O God, who art rich in mercy, "who openest thy hand, and fillest every living thing with benedictions" (in behalf of those poor sufferers); do not send me away without giving me some relief for their misery. You have said that whatever we do for the least of our brethren you will consider as done for yourself; enable me now to do what you command, and command what you please; give me the succors you wish me to bestow on them, and permit me not any longer to behold you suffering in their persons without being able to console you.

11. It is not so common to forget to recur to God in adversity as in prosperity, and yet it is strange that when

our affairs succeed, when all goes well with us, we neglect to speak of them to God, and thus lose the sweetest consolation we can enjoy on earth—that of entertaining ourselves with our amiable benefactor. As soon, then, as you receive any pleasing news, or that any thing advantageous happens to you, hasten, as fidelity and friendship require, to acquaint Him with it, adding, that what augments your joy is that you know your prosperity proceeds from the charitable hand of His providence. By this means your joy will increase, and will be more pure and more lasting.

Like the Sunamite, the holy spouse of whom Solomon sings, declare to your Lord the multitude of His benefits, and the extent of His liberalities. Say with her, "In our gates all hath budded; the new and the old, my beloved, I have kept for thee. You, my dear Spouse, are the donor of these numberless benefits which contribute to my comfort. I

accept them from your hand to share them with you in the persons of your poor, and to testify to you my gratitude and love. If I love your benefits, O Lord, it is only for the sake of the benefactor; you alone will be always the God of my heart, my portion and inheritance for ever.'' (Ps. lxxii. 26.)

12. Although the Providence of God consoles the Christian in interior pains, which are of all others the most difficult to be supported, yet they hinder us from recurring to Him present in us, by retaining us buried as it were in our miseries, and giving rise to an infinity of desolating reflections. The soul, taking what she suffers for the effects of the divine wrath, instead of regarding it, with the prophet, as the effect of a sanctifying indignation, is thus kept back rather than encouraged to recur to Him.

The course to be pursued in these painful circumstances is, first, to omit

nothing that God commands, whether with regard to our essential duties or our ordinary exercises of piety; however difficult and distasteful they appear, they will always be done well when done for God, and in spite of our own natural repugnance.

Second. To assure one's self that God will give at death consolation for all that we do without consolation during life, and to submit to His will, enter into His designs and abandon one's self to His providence.

Third. To hope against hope that He will derive glory from our miseries, and work our salvation by what seems capable of retarding it; provided we resist temptations, particularly those arising from discouragement or impatience.

Fourth. To call to mind the favors received from the divine bounty, as well as those passages of Scripture calculated to excite our confidence—thus, God is

faithful and will not permit us to be tempted above what we are able. (I Cor. x. 13.) The Lord is nigh to all who are in tribulation, and He will save the humble of spirit. (Ps. xxxix. 19.) Because thou wast acceptable to God, it was necessary that temptation should prove thee. (Tob. xii. 13.) The best means of honoring God is, to consecrate ourselves to His service, and immolate ourselves to His glory. It is but just to please God in time, that he may be our consolation in eternity.

It must, however, be confessed, that however reasonable and solid these sentiments are, they make not always a consoling impression, such as an afflicted soul would desire; but to sanctify her pains it is quite enough to humble herself before the Lord, and to submit to His good pleasure. When, then, Christian soul, you experience those disgusts, dryness, distractions or discouragements too frequent in the spiritual life, and of

which you are not able to trace the cause, address yourself to God with holy Job, saying: Now my soul fadeth within myself, and the days of affliction possess me. (Job. xxx. 16.) I can not tell you, my Lord, how I feel. My soul is disgusted with everything; nothing pleases it, not even yourself. My prayers are tepid and distracted; I can not preserve in your presence the attention I owe you; "my strength faileth me, and the light of my eyes itself is not with me." (Ps. xxxvii. 11.) I know not whence proceeds this ill humor, this perverse inclination to transgress your laws. I can not conceive how my ancient weakness has returned; passions which I thought overcome, strong and vigorous; habits which I thought destroyed, as rooted to all appearances as ever. All I know is, that you have my cure in your own hands, and that you have only to speak the word and the tempest shall be appeased.

Remember, Lord, that I am misery itself. To whom shall I go but to thee, "who art my strength and my support, my refuge in every tribulation?"

13. Nothing is more common than to be shaken by contradictions and unpleasant accidents, because they are either unexpected or we think them unjust and unreasonable. Regard those trying circumstances, for which mankind have so much disrelish, as precious occasions sent expressly by Providence to teach you to overcome yourself, and to confirm you in patience. Do the same with those corrupt infirmities, which St. Gregory styles merciful punishments, the justice of God acting on those occasions under the influence of His paternal bounty. Submitting to the hand which strikes you, will render your sufferings less insupportable and more meritorious.

Your resignation, however, need not prevent you from applying to him for

your cure. You can say without danger of offending God, Lord, if you will, you can make me clean; say but the word and my disease shall be removed. I shall not say, with the poor woman in the Gospel, "If I can but touch the hem of your garment, I shall be healed," but if I am happy enough to receive you in the adorable sacrament of your love, I shall fear no evils of soul or body. I ask health of you, O Lord, to employ it in loving and serving you, and to procure your glory and the salvation of my neighbor; but if you foresee I will not make this use of it, burn, cut, chastise this body of sin for the expiation of past crimes, and as a preventive against future ones. Let me suffer as long as you please, provided I suffer with patience.

14. In those troubles which are not less contrary than the foregoing to your design of ever preserving your soul in peace, and of remaining always united

to God, so that you can no longer remain with Mary at the feet of Jesus, but look after an infinity of affairs with Martha, do not say you can no longer hear His word or enjoy the sweetness of His divine conversation. You must know, faithful soul, that it would be an inexcusable error to believe that the occupations of your state, commanded as they are by God, should oblige you to forget Him; and, surely, you will acknowledge that your labors do not preclude your speaking to the persons who chance to come in your way, without, at the same time, ceasing or diminishing your attention. Now could you not as easily speak of them to God, who is really interested for you, and who will listen to all you have to say? Could you not say, when about to commence them, with the Holy Spouse, "Let us get up early to the vineyards: let us see if the vineyards flourish, if the flowers be ready to bring forth fruit, if

the pomegranates flourish?'' (Cant. vii. 12.) It is time to labor and apply to business, my beloved; leave me not to myself amidst its embarrassments. I do not fear them, provided they do not separate me from you, and that while I labor, my eyes and my heart may be still with you.

When a person speaks to God while at work, labor is no longer a distraction, but a devotion of great merit; its fatigue, too, is thereby considerably lessened. If Mary has more consolation than Martha, she has not more merit. A person who would preserve a spirit of recollection in the midst of a crowded market, or in the hurry of business, would undoubtedly, please God more than one who would allow his mind to be dissipated while he remained in his oratory.

15. Those who imagine that to speak so freely to God is to trangress against the respect due to His Divine Majesty, are greatly deceived; they know little of

the greatness of God. His immensity infinitely surpasses all that we can conceive of it, because at the same time that it is more unbounded than the earth, it is as limited as the smallest creature, and is found as entire in a flower as in the empyreal heaven.

And this should convince us that He is the true and only object worthy of our love, since we find in Him alone the two qualities which more powerfully claim our affections—superiority and equality; that is, a supreme greatness which raises Him infinitely above us, and an infinite bounty which abases Him to us. He is our master, and, at the same time, He is, in some manner, our equal. Of Him alone it is we can say with truth, "My beloved to me, and I to Him." (Can. ii. 16.) Though He is all, and I am nothing, He has placed Himself on a level with me. His wisdom has taken upon Him my misery, and rendered my littleness ca-

pable of containing His immensity.

16. You are free, Christian soul, to humble and annihilate yourself in the temple of this great God, and, above all, at the time of sacrifice, when His Divine Son is immolated to His glory; but at those periods which we have indicated you are culpable of great ingratitude, if you use not the respectable freedom of a spouse who tenderly loves her spouse, and who has no other language than the language of love. It is in these happy moments that He calls you His well-beloved, and forbids you to call Him Lord or Master.

Call me, does He say, call me the God of your heart, the God of your consolation, the Father of mercies, the sweetest object of your hopes and desires, the most desirable, the most amiable, and the most perfect friend—your all, in fine, whose heart is but one with yours, and whose grace and love are the life of your soul.

But in these transports of tenderness, do not confine yourself to what merely relates to yourself; speak to Him also of what concerns Himself, as His felicity, His greatness, His works, His attributes; speak of them as the saints have done, by sighs and ejaculations, in which they displayed all their eloquence. O Lord, Our Lord, says David, how wonderful is thy name in all the earth. How lovely are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts! O the depth of the riches of the wisdom and of the knowledge of God! Thy power and thy justice, O God, even to the highest, great things thou hast done O God, who is like to thee? (Ps. lxx. 19.)

Omit not, also, to entertain Him with the greatest of all miracles—the Incarnation of the Word, and the redemption of the human race by His sufferings and death. Repeat to him all that you have heard or read of His sacred Passion, interspersing it with acts of faith and love, gratitude and confidence.

Tell Him sometimes, with sentiments of compunction, that you see not less clearly on the cross the extraordinary effects of divine justice, than the wickedness of your own criminal life, and the many motives you have to humble and annihilate yourself. Beg of Him to pardon the sins of your past life. Say with the Psalmist: "The sins of my youth and my ignorances, remember not, O Lord; I am afflicted that my heart is incapable of feeling all the sorrow they deserve. I wish I had all the contrition that has ever been experienced, that I might bewail them in some manner proportioned to their enormity."

This desire is very pleasing to God, as is seen in David, Peter, Magdalen, and many others who, in the excess of their grief, wished, after bewailing their sins for years, for a fountain of tears wherein to efface them. Imitate these holy penitents. Sometimes exclaim,

"Why can not I, my God, intermingle torrents of tears with the torrents of blood which you shed for me in your passion? I am inconsolable when I reflect that though in your great mercy you have pardoned me my sins, yet—that it will be always true—that there was a time in which I was an object of indignation in your divine presence. My only consolation is, that you have promised by your prophet to "cast all our sins into the depths of the sea, because you delight in mercy." (Mich. vii. 19.)

17. If ever you chance to be troubled by the fear of being guilty of some secret sin, or that God may have determined to rank you with the reprobate, be quite ashamed of this disquietude, considering it a fault more displeasing to His goodness and mercy than any other of which you may have been guilty. In the same manner, if you feel discouraged at the considera-

tion of your weakness, or if your imagination be disturbed by chimerical fears of the power of men or the malice of devils, take heed of indulging them; think that you are unworthy of the protection of the Most High, extended as it is over you, when you entertain such unfounded apprehension.

Say to God on these occasions, Whence, O Lord, arises this anxiety, so injurious to your love? It is true, I am a vile sinner, but you are the Savior of sinners. I hear you say to me in accents of love and mercy: Little worm as thou art, worthy of being trampled on by all, console thyself; fear nothing, since I am thy Creator, thy beloved, thy faithful friend—one who has sworn that the world should pass away rather than I should suffer thee to perish.

These, my God, are consoling truths. Your prophet, moreover, assures me that you bear me in your arms as your cherished child, who knows not how to

walk, and that even to old age you will not abandon me. (Ps. xlvi. 4.)

I shall not fear, then, with so many motives of confidence, and I heartily regret my past disquietudes.

To fortify this confidence, and open your heart more fully to peace and consolation, often call to mind the particular favors you have received from God, and the special proofs you have had of His goodness toward you. This is one of the subjects He is most pleased to hear you speak of. Say, then, to Him occasionally: It is you, O Lord, who hast stretched forth your hand, who hast delivered me from death, who hast dried up my tears, broken my chains, pardoned my ingratitudes, cured my maladies, strengthened my weakness, "crowned me with glory and honor, and make me a little less than the angels." "What shall I render to thee, O Lord, for all thou hast done for me? Bless the Lord, O my soul, and let all

that is within me praise His holy name."

18. What is the most advantageous in this holy conversation with God is, that though He seems not to speak to you, He has a certain language, which is peculiar to Himself, whereby He engraves in your soul, in an extraordinary manner, those truths which His love prompts Him to communicate. Sometimes it is by inspiring almost imperceptibly certain things which console you, by shedding lights which illumine you, by reflections which discover what you should do, and which point out to you the best means of succeeding in your undertakings. However, it may please Him to reply to you, it is certain that, provided you address Him with that holy freedom and confidence of what we have been speaking, He will not fail to do so—not in words, but in a spiritual manner which faithful souls will understand.

19. We have faithful souls, because

to understand it requires detachment from earthly things and the practice of the interior life; and from this we may infer the necessity all Christians are under of being interior men. To be more fully convinced of it, it is quite sufficient to reflect on these words of our Lord already quoted: "The hour cometh, and now is, when the true adorers will adore the Father in spirit and in truth." If the true adorers adore in spirit, they must be false adorers who do not. And, alas! how numerous are they not! Some cannot refrain from manifesting wrath and indignation if spoken to of being interior and spiritual, as if they deem it unworthy of them and the way of life they profess; others, as if they imagined themselves incapable of attaining it, or were willing to think so, because they know it will cost them very dear: both because they persuade themselves that the interior life is not essential to salvation, as if the whole

tendency of the Gospel was not to form it in the hearts of Christians. But to do away with the objections of those two classes, the interior life has been that led by Christ Jesus, our divine model, and that of all those who have sanctified themselves by His imitation, and whose sanctity ever has been esteemed in the Church in proportion as their lives have been interior. And then, so far from this holy practice being wearisome and disagreeable, as they suppose who know it not by experience, it has ever been found by those who have embraced it to be the truest source of peace and consolation.

The only question now is, in what does this life consist, and how all Christians can and should aspire to it?

20. By the corporal life, two things may be understood—its principle, which is the union of the body and soul; and the actual exercise of this life, which is to see, hear and speak; or, in fine,

employ any of the corporal organs.

The interior life, also, consists in two things: the union of the soul with God, and the actual exercise of this all-divine life, as to contemplate God, to speak to God, to listen to God, and to do all that is calculated to entertain that happy commerce a Christian soul can have with God. We do not mean to explain here that union with God which is called habitual, and which consists in being in his grace and friendship, and exempt from mortal sin, but the means of entertaining and preserving this union, which is no other than the practice of the interior life. If we examine why so many Christians separate themselves from God by mortal sin, after contracting with Him an union which should be eternal, we shall find it to proceed from their negligence in regarding God present, and from their want of fidelity in listening and speaking to Him. They content themselves with thinking of

Him for a moment, and lightly, at prayer or when they approach the sacraments, but this scarcely without any interruption of their habit of thinking of and occupying themselves incessantly with creatures. There is no reason, then, to be astonished that they so ill observe the promises made to God and to His minister in the holy tribunal, nor at their abuse of the sacraments.

But they are not sinners alone who fall into this blindness. Many poor souls who live exempt from crime make no progress in virtue, for want of cultivating the interior life. They are like those deaf and dumb persons who enjoy not the principal advantages of existence; for must not that soul be blind, indeed, who knows and firmly believes that God is always present with her and in her, and yet who passes whole days without once beholding Him? Must she not be deaf when she scarcely knows what it is to hear His

voice? Must she not, in fine, be dumb, when she is ignorant of the manner of conversing with this God? Thus it is, that living with this God as though He were remote from them, they always continue in their imperfections; are always as full of self-love, as weak, as unfaithful, as attached to the things of earth, after many years of a pretended devout life, as if they only commenced yesterday.

And let them not allege, by way of excuse, that the interior life is not for every one, and that all are not capable of it. For, after all, to become interior we have only to change the objects on which the powers of our soul act—that is, to substitute God for the creature, to accustom ourselves to recollect in Him our minds, which are incessantly dissipated on creatures, and to keep our hearts closely united to Him by love and affection; to enter into ourselves, and keep ourselves retired in the sol-

itude of the heart as much as we can, and there to speak to, look at, and listen to God.

Our Lord invites us to this practice when He says, "Come to me all ye who labor and are burdened, and I will refresh you." (Matt. xi. 28.) Recollect your wandering thoughts, return from your dissipation, relinquish your frivolous and vain affections, and I will console you; I will make you taste those delights which they enjoy who are always with me. He solicits us again to it in these words of the Apocalypse: "Behold, I stand at the gate and knock: if any man shall hear my voice, and open to me the door, I will come unto him and sup with him, and he with me." (iii. 20.)

This mysterious supper is that holy commerce which God wishes to have with us in prayer, which is the true good of the soul, and the delicious banquet after which we ought to hunger,

in order to be of the number of those of whom our Lord says, "Not in bread alone does man live, but in every word that proceedeth from the mouth of God." (Mat. iv. 4.) But to be nourished by and reap advantage from this blessed food, we should be truly humble. Our Lord in His prayer the night before His passion, thanks His eternal Father for having concealed His secrets from the proud and revealed them to the humble and simple, which shows us that humility and contempt of self are necessary, in order to advance in the holy science of prayer and the interior life.

In fine, as a last proof of our obligation to become interior, if we would be true Christians, we should attend to these other words of our Lord: "The kingdom of God is within you" (Luke xvii. 21), for they tell us plainly that it is in the heart God wishes to establish his throne, and that it is in the secret of

the soul He desires to be loved and adored, which certainly can never be effected without prayer and recollection.

These words, too, insinuate the obligation we are under of reigning over ourselves, and of subjecting our passions. But without the spirit of prayer and recollection this can not be done, the practice of the interior life being the only means of enabling us to say with the prophet: "I have run in the way of your commandments when you have dilated my heart." (Ps. cxviii. 32.) A man of prayer not only runs, but even flies in the path of virtue; it being impossible to apply to this holy exercise, even for a short time, without experiencing a great facility in all that regards the service of God, and making great advances towards Christian perfection. Once more, it is absolutely necessary for it. As the new man is brought forth by the destruction of the old through salutary renunciation; as

the first duty of a Christian is to know and imitate Jesus Christ; as the virtues proper of a Christian are humility, disengagement, patience, sweetness, mortification and penance, it is certain that one can not better do all this, which is so contrary to human inclination, than by having his heart penetrated by a frequent, lively and respectful view of the Divine Majesty, together with the practice of meditation, which, after convincing us of the necessity of these virtues, inspires us with resolution to practice them.

Thus we avoid the misfortune of those who appear to do neither great good nor great evil: persons who might be called good pagans, but bad Christians; men who are full of human sense, but have little faith and no piety.

We have often said before in the course of this work that the holy exercise of prayer and recollection was the way by which God conducted all His

servants. St. Paul says of Moses, that he bore all adversities as seeing the Invisible; and God himself says, by the mouth of the Psalmist, that He will give understanding and teach us the way by which we should go, having his eyes upon us, and engaging us to fix ours on Him. (Ps. xxxi. 8.)

21. Since recollection is so advantageous and so essential to a Christian that he can never attain the science of prayer without it, it is extremely desirable that all persons should employ therein some portion of each day. It is the true means of fixing the inconstancy and lightness of the human mind, which, having contracted the habit of incessantly running from one object to another, to seek its repose and satisfaction, can not bear the shadow of restraint. As a person can not read without having first learned to spell, so no one can preserve himself long in the presence of God, amidst the cares and embarrass-

ments of business, except he has accustomed himself to it by the practice of prayer.

As the only end a person proposes to himself in this holy exercise, is to occupy himself with God alone on what regards his salvation, this alone, if faithfully practiced, disposes to recollection during the day.

It is not to those who begin to exercise the holy presence of God that prayer is necessary—those who have long practiced it require it, too—because the facility of preserving it diminishes with time, and is opposed by the attention and care necessary for external occupations. But some may say that they find it as hard to be recollected at prayer as at any other time; and as this often arises from not knowing in what prayer consists, we shall give an idea of it in a few words borrowed from St. Theresa, so experienced in this holy science: "Prayer, or meditation," says

this saint, "is nothing else, in my opinion, than the means of engaging ourselves to depend absolutely as slaves on the will of Him who has testified for us so much love; it is an interior conversation of the soul with God, in which she testifies her love for Him, and her confidence that He reciprocally loves her."

According to this definition, when we undertake to meditate we should call to mind the presence of Him to whom we are going to speak, and endeavor to retain our minds and hearts in that holy slavery, which St. Paul calls "the true liberty of the children of God"—our minds, by withdrawing them from all other occupation, banishing all other ideas but those which lead us to God; our hearts, by emptying them of every other feeling but that of praising, honoring and serving Him. If we feel discouraged at the difficulty we experience in doing this, we should console our-

selves by the assurance given us by the same saint that the sole effort to preserve ourselves in the Divine Presence is in itself a prayer. It is true, nature does not find its account in this, and hence tempts us to abandon it at once, under pretense of remaining idle and doing nothing therein; but if we reflect that God invites and solicits us to remain with Him, if we consider that it is sufficient that He well knows that we remain with Him purely for His love, though we feel no satisfaction in doing so, we would never think of abandoning, but rather faithfully persevere in it.

22. Here some will reply: All that is very good for faithful souls who have been a long time serving God, but how can I, who have so much offended Him, and done nothing for Him, hope that He loves me? How can I testify how much I love Him, when I feel not a sentiment of His love?

To this we reply, that to separate

one's self from the rest of mankind, whom "God has so much loved," that, as the Apostle says, "He spared not even His own Son, but delivered Him up for them" (John iii. 16), would be in itself a fatal error. And, then, what has not this divine Son done to prove His love? He has given His life and blood, and even gives His sacred flesh in the most holy sacrament of the altar for this end.

Such are a few of the general marks of His love. Are they insufficient to convince you of it? Could you require stronger and more authentic? As for the particular ones, you can not deny that they are beyond number; and, surely, you can not, without extreme ingratitude, forget them, or cease to say with David (after having acknowledged with Jeremy, that it is owing to the mercy of the Lord that you have not been consumed), "the mercies of the Lord I will sing for ever." (Ps. lxxxviii.)

These are the sentiments St. Theresa says we should entertain on approaching God in prayer; and they may be followed by the greatest sinners, provided they have a sincere desire to be converted.

As to the other part of the definition of prayer given us by the saint—that it is nothing else than testifying to God how much we love Him—it signifies that to prove to God how much we love Him, by using a holy violence in detaching ourselves from creatures, and being occupied by him alone at a stated time every day, is prayer, because this is one of the things for which we should particularly pray, and we can acquit ourselves of it perfectly, though without any lively or sensible feeling of love. Indeed, it is giving him a stronger proof of attachment to remain in prayer when we are bereft of consolation, for then, as St. Theresa says, a person serves God at one's own expense, and acquires considerable merit.

The third idea of prayer is, that it consists of thinking of and understanding what we say, and to whom we say it. In this manner, for example: Alas! who am I, who have the boldness to converse with so great Majesty? This, and similar thoughts, says this enlightened soul, are, properly speaking, mental prayer. Do not, then, allow the name to terrify you, as if it included or meant some incomprehensible mystery. Such is not the case.

This is very consoling for those who find meditation or mental prayer difficult, since it shows that to perform this exercise does not require much reasoning or studied thoughts, but rather in considering the greatness of Him in whose presence we are, and our own unworthiness. There is nothing easier, and, at the same time, more necessary for all Christians, for prayer unaccompanied by these considerations, and

which consists only in words, can not be truly called prayer.

If this be the case, some one may here ask, can not I meditate while reciting vocal prayers? Without doubt you can, and you should, since vocal prayer is not a true prayer, if unaccompanied by application of the mind and heart; if, as St. Theresa says, we do not "think of what we say, and to whom we speak," and, in fine, if our souls are not animated by sentiments of love, gratitude, confidence and humility.

Another manner of mental prayer is, to reflect seriously before God on the importance of salvation, the different means of succeeding in it, and the various obstacles which oppose themselves to it, whether on the part of the world or our own passions.

And now, after all that has been said in this little work, in recommendation of the practice of the presence of God, of the excellence and utility of mental

prayer, of recollection and retirement within one's self, by which man can acquire and preserve a life all spiritual, all holy, and, in some manner, all divine, it were deplorable that persons should be found who, obstinately bent on adhering to creatures, would remain in their dissipation without troubling themselves to call to mind often the presence of God, or making serious reflections from time to time on their duties and obligations towards His Divine Majesty, and on all that can contribute to augment their faith, hope and charity. Christians of this character, so far from making any progress in virtue, would be, on the contrary, in great danger of finding themselves at death in the broad road of perdition, having all their lives rejected what was most capable of securely conducting them in the narrow path which leads to God.

In conclusion, may the most holy and adorable Trinity ever penetrate our

hearts with respect for its supreme greatness, admiration and love for its incomprehensible perfections, and gratitude for its innumerable benefits, that every moment of our life, being animated and sanctified by sentiments of His fear and love, we may be able to render Him one day, in union with the holy angels, the eternal praise and thanks due to His infinite goodness. Amen. Amen.

ON THE USE OF THE CRUCIFIX.

The Crucifix, or image of Jesus crucified, is not intended to be useless to us—it is not set before us to look at with indifference. It is the image of images, there being none more holy, none more amiable.

When alone with God often take up this sign of salvation and victory, and, regarding it earnestly, prostrate yourself before it, kiss its wounds, give yourself its benediction, entertain your-

self with all confidence with this precious pledge of love, this instrument of grace, and you will soon feel what wonders can be effected by it.

The image of Jesus crucified is the foundation of the interior edifice, the repeller of distractions, the scourge of devils, the antidote against temptations, the death of nature, the source of prayer, the life of the spirit, the gate of contemplation.

There is not a more powerful means of recollecting our senses and recalling our minds from their wanderings than to lead them to Calvary and enchain them to the foot of the cross. There, empty of all things, they will become full of Jesus crucified, and our souls, with all their powers concentrated, as it were, and mixed up in His Passion.

THE END.

GTU LIBRARY
3 2400 00560 2119

GTU Library
2400 Ridge Road
Berkeley, CA 94709
For renewals call (510) 649-2500

All items are subject to recall.